

VZCZCXRO2778
OO RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHAH #0804/01 2081230
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271230Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7618
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0401
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/HSE/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ASHGABAT 000804

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA (PERRY), SA DAS (GASTRIGHT)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNUNSC](#) [ECON](#) [ENGR](#) [ETRD](#) [PARM](#) [IR](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: THE JULY 24-25 STATE VISIT OF IRANIAN PRESIDENT
AHMADINEJAD TO TURKMENISTAN: BIG BROTHER DOMINATES

REF: A. DUSHANBE 1423

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0787

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Iranian President Ahmadinejad was clearly in control, with President Niyazov playing only a secondary role, during the Iranian President's July 24-25 state visit to Turkmenistan. Notwithstanding the local state media's assertions that the visit centered on developing economic links -- the two leaders signed five minor agreements and a joint communique -- the visit clearly was an awkward getting-to-know-you event for both prickly leaders. Although President Niyazov seemed uncharacteristically eager to please his guest, even yielding to the latter's wishes not to morph the visit into another cult-of-personality spectacle, it is clear from the security-focused joint communique that Niyazov drew a line at compromising Turkmenistan's position of neutrality.⁸ Per ref a, banning discussing of Iran's nuclear program apparently was a prerequisite for Ahmadinejad's visit, which was at Niyazov's invitation. End summary.

Second Iranian State Visit to Independent Turkmenistan

[1](#)2. (C) Accompanied by his Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Energy, Commerce, Oil, and Roads and Transportation, President Ahmadinejad of Iran made his first state visit to Turkmenistan on July 24-25. This is the second-ever state visit since Turkmenistan's independence. Former Iranian President Rafsanjani visited in the early nineties. Amid very heavy security, President Ahmadinejad met multiple times with Turkmenistan's President, Saparmurat Niyazov, made the obligatory visit to the national mosque where President Niyazov's parents and brothers are buried, made a rare speech before the Mejlis (Turkmenistan's Parliament), and attended the formal opening of a new border crossing station. In a departure from usual practice here, however, local diplomats were not invited to any of these events, including to the July 25 state banquet -- at the request of the Iranian president (according to the usually well-informed Turkish ambassador). Media coverage of the visit was front-page, glowing and extensive.

Niyazov Restrained

¶3. (C) Belying the glowing press spin, however, President Niyazov was uncharacteristically and visibly restrained, giving the impression to many that he was treading carefully in order to avoid offending his guest. Twice during televised exchanges with President Ahmadinejad, President Niyazov -- who is well-known for his frequently undiplomatic treatment of top-level visitors -- failed to respond to challenges, including one particularly insulting comment, from his Iranian visitor. In a (dopey) attempt to sound positive, Niyazov said that if the two met a few more times, they would be able to speak each other's languages. In response Ahmadinejad noted it would take Niyazov twice as long to learn Farsi as it would take him to learn Turkmen. Niyazov also allowed President Ahmadinejad to take control of a joint press conference, while he drew back and made only occasional statements. Going down a receiving line of the diplomatic corps before the formal pass-in-review in Ahmadinejad's honor, briefly stopping in front of representatives from the British, French and OSCE missions, Niyazov said:

-- &He8 (Ahmadinejad) had not criticized either Israel or Lebanon (not true; see para 7 below);

-- The primary focus of the visit had been economic; and

-- There had been discussion of Caspian Sea borders, but no agreement had been reached.

ASHGABAT 00000804 002 OF 004

The Results: Less Than Might Be Expected

¶4. (SBU) During the visit, the two sides signed seven bilateral documents:

-- a declaration regarding the opening of the new border crossing at Howdan-Bajgiran;

-- a memorandum on cooperation in the areas of security and border issues;

-- a program for tourism cooperation (Comment: Local hotel workers tell us Iranian tourism mostly consists of Iranians in search of alcohol and hookers. End comment.);

-- an agreement on bilateral cooperation on livestock and veterinary sanitation;

-- a memorandum of cooperation on energy in which Turkmenistan agreed to increase delivery of electrical power to Iran;

-- a joint letter from Presidents Niyazov and Ahmadinejad to President Karzai of Afghanistan; and

-- a joint communique.

The two sides also agreed to set up a joint committee to work on issues related to gas sales, but did not reach agreement on new gas prices or increased gas deliveries to Iran. (Note: In March, Turkmenistan turned off gas deliveries to Iran until Iran raised the price from \$42 to \$65/tcm and also agreed to buy 14 bcm annually vice 8-10 bcm. Turkmenistan sends gas to Iran from the Korpeje gas field via the Korpeje/Kurt Kui pipeline. End note.) Only the joint communique and -- potentially -- the joint letter to President Karzai (embassy has not seen a text) are substantively significant; the remaining documents appear largely to be window-dressing for an otherwise very tough visit.

15. (SBU) During the press conference, President Niyazov uncharacteristically indicated that he and President Ahmadinejad had some very difficult negotiations, with neither side wanting to back down. Of the documents that were signed, however, only the joint communiqué reflects this tension. Although nothing in the document conflicts with positions laid out by the Government of Turkmenistan, the content appears to have been based on an Iranian draft, with some language subsequently softened and made more &neutral8 by the Turkmenistan side.

16. (SBU) In this regard, the document's treatment of security issues is particularly notable. Specifically, the communiqué:

-- Stresses the efforts of both countries to strengthen peace and stability and to establish a climate of trust and mutual benefit in regional and international affairs;

-- Notes the need to resolve international questions only through peaceful and diplomatic means.

-- Expresses Turkmenistan's support for the &active and positive role8 of Iran and the orientation of Iran's domestic policies in resolving international questions directed toward strengthening &peace, stability and tranquility,8 and reaffirms Iran's support for Turkmenistan's neutrality.

-- States that both presidents attach special significance to the strengthening of the UN's central role in resolving global security issues and the importance of not using force, threats or unilateral action to resolve international disputes (Comment: This point, which almost certainly is directed toward the United States, in particular seems to reflect an effort by Turkmenistan to tone down initially

ASHGABAT 00000804 003 OF 004

tough Iranian language. Charge had personally delivered ref b update on the status of the P5 1 Iran Initiative to Foreign Minister Meredov on July 21. End comment.).

-- Stresses that both countries consider that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trans-national crime, terrorism and drugs pose some of the biggest threats to peace and stability on the planet and reiterates the willingness of both sides to cooperate in the battle against these threats; and

-- Reiterates that neither side will allow its territory to be used against the other.

The document also stressed the need to reach agreement on a document on Caspian Sea borders, decided only by the five countries involved, and called for a second summit of heads of Caspian countries in Tehran.

Inflammatory Address to Iranians Living in Turkmenistan

17. (SBU) During his visit, President Ahmadinejad delivered an inflammatory address at the al-Zahra Mosque to a gathering of Iranians resident in Turkmenistan. According to a BBC report, President Ahmadinejad, after criticizing the UN Security Council for its alleged dual standard in dealing with &the Zionist regime,8 asserted that the big powers controlling the region were trying to exert their hegemony over the entire region. He accused these "big powers" of deliberately trying to halt the @ional nations,8 advancement. Ahmadinejad also said that the Lebanese nation, despite being under the severe attacks of the &Zionist regime,8 has demonstrated that Israel is not invulnerable

and has not permitted them (Israeli troops) to move an inch ahead. He credited Lebanon,s success to a &popular force,8 which has succeeded in inflicting more damage on Israel in 13 days than three countries, fighting jointly, were able to do the last time they went to war. Iran supported all oppressed nations in the world, he continued, but Iran,s support was merely of a spiritual and political nature. Ahmadinejad then focused on the role that Iranians living abroad should fulfill, arguing that any Iranian expatriate should be an ambassador of the &rich Iranian culture and civilization.8

Local Pools Closed

18. (C) Ashgabat practically closed down during the two day visit. Combined local and Iranian security forces were evident throughout the city and entire sections of major thoroughfares were shut down for lengthy periods to allow for the motorcades. The city also went through a major cleanup, with curbs freshly painted and lane lines painted for the first time down the main road to the Iranian border. The Iranian delegation was spread out between the Grand Turkmen, President and Serdar hotels, with Ahmadinejad staying in the presidential suite at the latter. Local diplomats and other hotel guests tell us the swimming pools at the Grand Turkmen and the President were closed for the visit so as not to expose the visitors to stray views of flesh. Interestingly, other guests at the President Hotel, normally off-limits to prostitutes by presidential order unless various foreign delegations are in town, reported seeing prostitutes in the hotel lobby during the visit.

Comment

19. (C) Notwithstanding President Niyazov,s assertions to the diplomats and the glowing press coverage, this visit was neither fraternal nor focused on economics. Relations between Turkmenistan and its much larger and more powerful neighbor to the south remain cautious at best: the border is heavily guarded, travel restrictions on Iranians are tight here, and President Niyazov has needed to mend fences ever since he came out openly in support of President Ahmadinejad,s opponent in the last Iranian presidential election. President Niyazov, who continues to try to negotiate higher gas prices with Russia, undoubtedly also

ASHGABAT 00000804 004 OF 004

hoped to use this visit to suggest to Moscow that it would continue to plan to diversify its pipeline options. However, it is unlikely that he succeeded in either objective. Ahmadinejad may only have accepted Niyazov's invitation as a stopping point on the way to Dushanbe for a "Farsi Summit," with Presidents Rakhmonov of Tajikistan and Karzai of Afghanistan. His almost total control of the trip's agenda indicates the desire to ensure nothing substantive resulted. That said, although President Niyazov clearly was prepared to defer to his guest in many respects, it is notable that he nonetheless drew the line at making statements that would compromise Turkmenistan,s neutrality by openly attacking the United States. End Comment.
BRUSH